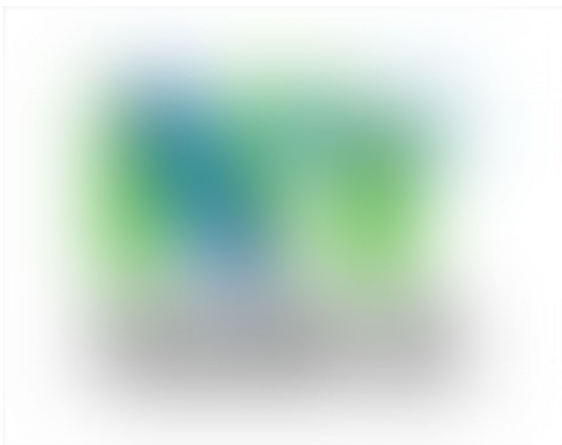


Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study Public Meeting

Evaluation of passenger rail alternatives along the Northern Tier Corridor of western Massachusetts.



Please scroll down to move through this on-demand virtual meeting.

This meeting was presented to the public on July 14, 2022.

Agenda

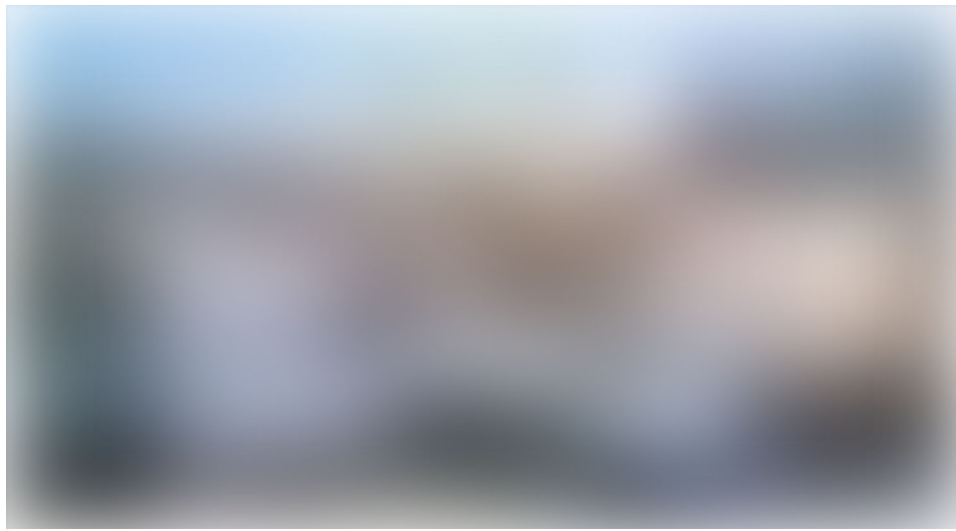
1. Study Background and Overview
2. Study Goals and Objectives

3. Review of Past Efforts
4. Current Conditions: Market Analysis
5. Current Conditions: Ownership, Operations, Right-of-Way
6. Issues and Opportunities Overview
7. Next Steps
8. Public Comment

Study Background

MassDOT is conducting a conceptual planning Study to examine the statewide and regional economic and environmental benefits as well as any associated implementation challenges, and identify all necessary improvements to support passenger rail service between Boston and Northwestern Massachusetts. This new passenger rail service would provide:

- 1) An alternative means of transportation for people living in the western and central counties along this corridor to more easily travel to the Greater Boston Metro Region.
- 2) A means for people living in the Boston area to more easily travel to the northern areas of Berkshire, Franklin and Worcester Counties.



Study Overview



Public meetings will take place at key Study milestones to solicit feedback from the public. Please note that public outreach will be a continuous process, therefore, there will be additional opportunities for engagement throughout the entirety of the Study.

Study Goals and Objectives

Goals and objectives were developed based on Working Group and public feedback. The goals and objectives for the Study are:

Goal: Support economic development along the Northern Tier corridor

- a. Objective: Improve connectivity and access to destinations (e.g., jobs and services, academic institutions, tourist attractions, etc.)
- b. Objective: Support the advancement of relevant economic development-related policies, plans, and designations
- c. Objective: Minimize impacts to freight rail operations

Goal: Promote transportation equity

- a. Objective: Increase mobility options between Western and Eastern Massachusetts

- b. Objective: Improve connectivity and reliability
- c. Objective: Enhance safety

Goal: Minimize impacts on public health and the environment from transportation

- a. Objective: Improve public health outcomes
- b. Objective: Minimize air/noise pollution and greenhouse gas emissions
- c. Objective: Minimize or avoid impacts to cultural or natural resources

Review of Past Efforts

- The Study team reviewed 25 past studies, consisting of:
 - Passenger rail and transportation studies
 - Municipal transportation plans/studies
 - Economic development studies
- The Study team identified information related to:
 - Demographics
 - Rail Infrastructure Conditions
 - Environmental Resources
 - Travel Patterns and/or Trends
 - Future Conditions

Key Takeaways:

- No previous corridor-wide evaluation of travel conditions along Route 2
- Most transportation planning has been focused more on local travel
- Opportunity for passenger rail service to tie into economic development efforts throughout the study area
- Need a better understanding of travel pattern changes due to COVID

Current Conditions: Market Analysis

- **Corridor Demographics**
 - Population
 - Cost of Living
 - Zero Car Households & Poverty Levels
 - Employment and Economic Development
 - Tourism and Major Attractions
 - 2020 to 2040 Forecasts
- **Travel Patterns Overview**
 - Overall Traffic Patterns
 - Travel by Vehicle

Notes on Demographic Data

- **All data represents pre-COVID conditions (2019)**
 - Full impact of COVID on society and travel patterns being evaluated
 - Team will be monitoring trends tied to commuting patterns, other travel patterns, employment trends, etc
- **Using most current MassDOT-approved population and employment forecasts by UMass Donahue Institute**
 - Updated forecasts that incorporate the 2020 Census and potential COVID impacts are in development

Corridor Demographics

Travel Patterns Overview

Travel Patterns Overview

- Motor vehicles are predominant mode of travel, especially west of I-495
- Most travel in the corridor is local (same county or adjacent)
- Travel volumes along Route 2 have grown closer to Boston but stagnated farther west
- Travel options beyond motor vehicle are limited west of Fitchburg

Market Analysis: Findings & Conclusions

- **Lack of Transportation Options**
 - Intercity travel choices west of Fitchburg are limited outside of personal vehicle use
- **No Unified Corridor Travel Behavior**
 - Trips leaving each segment more likely destined to communities outside the Route 2 Corridor
- **Population and Employment Declines Expected to Decrease Travel Demand from Worcester County Westward**
 - Based on current projections, underlying demographic dynamics could reduce major growth in these areas of the corridor

Current Conditions: Ownership, Operations, Right-of-Way

- Overview of the CSX Acquisition of Pan Am Railways
- Current freight and passenger operations

Ownership, Operations, Right-of-Way: Findings & Conclusions

- Current conditions and issues simultaneously present potential opportunities and constraints, including the ownership of the corridors and the state of the right-of-way infrastructure
 - CSX Acquisition may shift trains to B&A and may impose drawbacks such as new shared ROW requirements
 - The current right-of-way could support passenger service, but it has been maintained for freight service with grades, curves and single track that could limit the quantity or raise the cost of good passenger service
 - Existing handoff between passenger and freight dispatching on the Northern Tier has been a successful

model, but new ownership may change the model

- Many passenger train station locations may be able to host new stations
- Existing governance, regulatory and funding structures could support Northern Tier passenger service, including Amtrak access rights on freight railroads
- A new state Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Authority could promote development of new passenger services

Issues and Opportunities Discussion

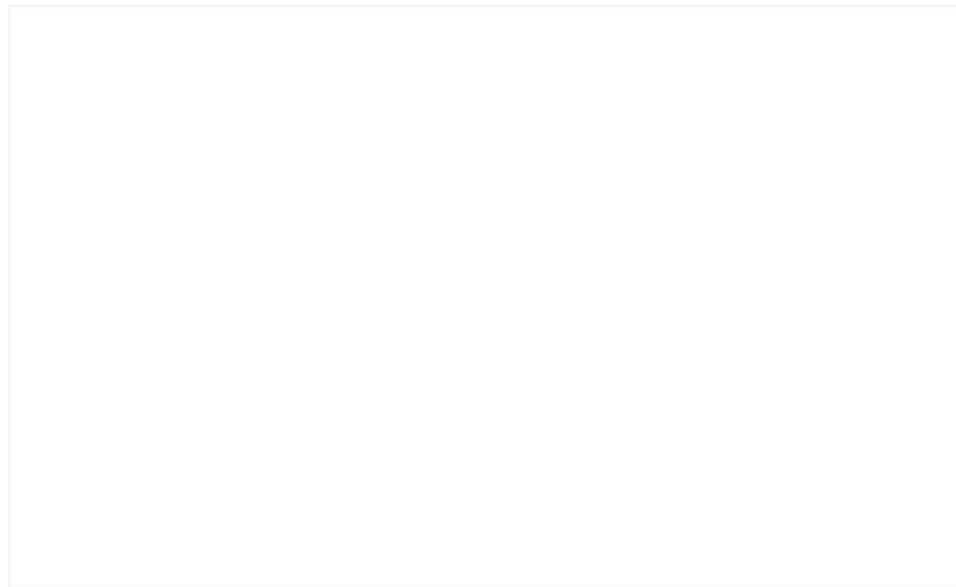
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Next Steps

1. **Public Involvement:** Fall 2021 - Spring 2023
2. **Documenting Past Efforts:** Fall 2021 - Winter 2022
3. **Current Conditions - Market Analysis:** Winter 2022 - Spring 2022
4. **Current Conditions - Physical, Regulatory and ROW Ownership:** Winter 2022 - Spring 2022
5. **Development of Potential Service Plans and Alternatives:** Spring 2022 - Winter 2023
6. **Alternatives Evaluation and Cost Estimates:** Summer 2022 - Winter 2023
7. **Development of Recommended Next Steps:** Winter 2023 - Spring 2023

Public Meeting Topics and Schedule

Public Comment



We want to hear from you!

Use the "**Study Website**" button to access the study website.

[Study Website](#)

Use the "**Comment Form**" button submit comments and questions to the study team.

Comment Form